New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1950

Volume XI, Number 23 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of October 30, 1950

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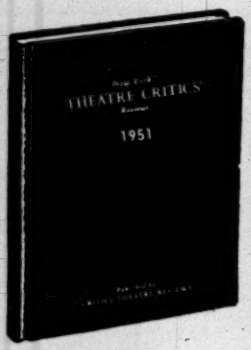

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"The Day After Tomorrow"

The New York Times

October 27, 1950

Frederick Lonsdale's 'The Day After Tomorrow,' Comedy With an English Setting

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Breaking a silence of seven lean years, Frederick Lonsdale has set pen to paper and produced "The Day After Tomorrow," which was acted at the Booth last evening. Out of respect for "Aren't We All?" and "The Last of Mrs. Cheyney," the unregenerate members of the audience are probably looking for another highly varnished comedy about upper-class sin. Since the new play includes the Duke of Bristol, Lord and Lady Crayne and the Bishop, the unregenerate playgoers have concrete reasons for expecting something pretty frivolous.

* * *

But halfway through the evening "The Day After Tomorrow" gets bogged down in a laggard romance between a rich American girl of low social stock and the penniless brother of the Duke of Bristol. The girl and the boy love each other rapturously from the moment they meet and they swear fervently that they never will love anyone else so long as they live, and this seems to be an extraordinarily solid situation.

In the circumstances, it beats the devil why they don't marry at once and live happily ever after. But, Mr. Lonsdale, who taught us many years ago that we should never take anything seriously, has a whole portfolio of scruples about this marriage and can think of more impediments to it than a parson.

* * *

"The Day After Tomorrow" is really a play about a family of well-born incompetents who are suddenly penniless in a world that has outgrown them. They are peevish, drunken, lazy and supercilious, which are very promising features in a Lonsdale play. But then the rich American girl comes in with a rich father who even has a heart of gold, and Mr. Lonsdale can't seem to manage her at all. These scruples about money do not become Mr. Lonsdale, who used to manage everything much more cynically. His spirit is still gay, but the heiress to ten million American dollars seems to have put him off his form. "The Day After Tomorrow" verges on the tedious before he gets his loquacious young people married.

Serving as his own director, he has not put together an immaculate performance. It drags its feet through the last half of the evening. As the priggish young Englishman who is too proud to marry an American fortune, Ralph Michael gives an uncommonly interesting and resourceful performance. Beatrice Pearson, who plays the American girl, is an attractive young lady, but still fairly monotonous in a part that should be full of quicksilver.

* * *

The cast includes some of our most inviting actors—Noel Leslie, Valerie Cossart, Madeleine Clive, John Merivale, Jack Watling and Richard Gordon, with Bramwell Fletcher particularly able in expressing the irascible dullness of George, the Duke of Bristol.

But Melville Cooper is an idealization of the spirit of Lonsdale. There is not a serious line in his face, and he looks as though he had never had a serious thought in his life. As Charles, Lord Crayne, in proper clothes denoting breeding, he looks quizzical and barks away at the dialogue with a hearty disdain for the words, the plot and the philosophy. That's the way a civilized English comedy ought to be played—with a kind of general crustiness and the knack for swallowing the last word in every sentence. Mr. Lonsdale ought to have more confidence in Mr. Cooper's practiced insincerity.

"THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW"

Comedy by Frederick Lonsdale; staged by Mr. Lonsdale; settings by Edward Gilbert; presented by Lee and J. J. Shubert at the Booth Theatre, October 26, 1950. The cast:

Gerard.....Ralph Michael
Charles.....Melville Cooper
The Bishop.....Noel Leslie
Venetia.....Madeleine Clive
Helen.....Monica Lang
Ernest.....John Merivale
John.....Jack Watling
Anne.....Valerie Cossart
George.....Bramwell Fletcher
Mary Flemin..Beatrice Pearson
Robert Flemin..Richard Gordon
Dr. Shaw.....George Mitchell
Tinne.....Ralph Sumpter
An Old Lady.....
Eva Leonard-Boyne

Synopsis: Act I. Sittingroom at the home of The Duke of Bristol, at the present time. Act II. The same as Act I, four weeks later. Act III. Scene 1. A room in a small cottage, the same night. Scene 2. The same as Act I, the next day.

New York World-Telegram and The [illegible] Sun

October 27, 1950

Easy Wit Brightens Comedy at Booth

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Type—British comedy.
Topic—Impoverished aristocracy.
Issue—Rescue by dollars and love.
Purpose—Solely to entertain.
Credit—Literate good humor.
I find it—An easy pleasure.

It is particularly interesting that Frederick Lonsdale's new comedy should arrive here the week that Barbara Hutton announces she is through with Europe and titled fortune hunters.

"The Day After Tomorrow," if it had ever happened to Miss Hutton, might have made her a good deal happier than she is.

In it, a charming, penniless, English nobleman teaches an American heiress that she cannot buy affection. By simply holding out against her multiple offers, he creates a sturdy promise of future happiness for them.

No Sermon.

But Lonsdale is certainly not preaching. This is the most delightful sort of conversational drawing-room comedy, a play where everybody talks about doing things, and nobody does them. In fact, the only draggy scene of the play is the one in which the principal characters edge up on a mutual seduction.

The author, who has been writing hits for over 40 years, sounds surprisingly refreshing when he uses devices as old as the hills. Maybe it is because modern realism scorns the frank artificiality which makes a play like this possible.

At any rate, there is an auto breakdown outside a castle, which lands an ailing American heiress on the hands of a Duke's family, currently down to its last ha'-penny. She falls in love with the one enterprising member of the large household. But he refuses to be kept.

The love affair seems destined for limbo, as a battle of wills proceeds. On the side, there is a battle of wits, as the young man's improvident family tries to push him into a marriage they see as an open cash drawer for them.

Quick Switch.

Lonsdale maneuvers people on and off the stage with the most relaxed kind of practicality. When a situation has run its course, he sends nine characters in to dinner. Three others come in from a different door, and start a new conversation.

There is even a scene in which the lady locks herself in a room alone for the night with the object of her adoration, and drops the key down her neck.

This kind of thing may be hackneyed, if it were not all used so purposefully as a frame for the most polished kind of humorous talk. It is artificial, genial and skillful, and the most effortless kind of pleasure to listen to.

The actors are most appropriately cast, and it is quite pleasant to have 14 of them lavished on a cheery light-weight vehicle of this kind.

Play's Mainstay.

It is questionable whether the role played by Melville Cooper would merit star billing in another actor's hands. It serves a collateral purpose, this uncle who is the most devastated of all the clan at the thought of going to work. Yet Mr. Cooper makes it a mainstay of the play's spirit and manner, until he is sorely missed whenever he is off stage.

The comedian is in his element here, as he plays with brilliant timing and the unabashed exaggeration that alone can give this kind of theater real innards.

Ralph Michael is entirely charming, handsome, and wilful in a pleasantly stern and loose-jointed way, as the demanding hero. And Beatrice Pearson most successfully conveys the idea of a steely spirited young lady whose casual appearance is soft as a powder puff.

Of the several other effective performances, I most enjoyed that of Jack Watling as a promising alcoholic.

New York Post
HOME NEWS
October 27, 1950

The Old England of Mr. Lonsdale
By Richard Watts Jr.

The world, and even England, may change, but Frederick Lonsdale goes on proudly unaltered. The Duke of Bristol still holds forth at his ancestral home, even though he is in dire financial straits these days, and his uncle, Lord Crayne, is there, and so are the Bishop, and, of course, Venetia, Lady Crayne, and some quaint but decent Americans, and they continue to make epigrams and discuss love brightly, just as they have done in Lonsdale plays for decade after decade. They are growing a little tired by now, but there is something sweet and nostalgic about their consistency.

The new Lonsdale comedy, or, rather, the latest version of the old Lonsdale comedy, which opened at the Booth last night, was known in England, I believe, as "The Way Things Go," but here it is called "The Day After Tomorrow." It might have been more accurate if they had decided to name it "The Day Before Yesterday." A wistful little effort has been made by Mr. Lonsdale to indicate that he is keeping up with the times by referring to social change and the economic collapse of the aristocracy, but the slight alteration will hardly fool anybody.

The Americans Enter

As I say, there is something disarming about the way the British playwright sticks gamely to his old pattern, and, for most of the first act, while the members of the Duke's family are sitting around and talking blithely of their declining fortunes, it is pleasant to listen to, even if the play seems older than Mr. Shaw's "Mrs. Warren's Profession." But, as soon as the Americans enter and the plot gets started, weariness sets in, and, from then on, "The Day After Tomorrow" takes a mighty long time to pass a given point.

Mr. Lonsdale's Americans are a big business man and his romantic young daughter. He tries gracefully to help the penniless Britons out by losing to them at cards, even though he is a famous authority on the game, and she falls in love with the Duke's youthful brother, who is determined to be a farmer. He won't marry her because he refuses to live on her money, and, since the British and Americans are notoriously reticent about discussing their private affairs, everyone talks endlessly about the girl's advances to the young man and his refusal to be kept. In the last act, the juveniles reach some sort of compromise.

No Infidelity

I'm afraid I am being a little unfair to Mr. Lonsdale in saying that he hasn't changed his comedy at all in all these years. He has shifted his attitude a little. I don't mean his mild references to the British social revolution. But he doesn't seem to be interested in infidelity the way he used to be. His people now lead remarkably blameless lives, and everything is worked out on a plane of high romantic devotion. It doesn't appear to help, however. There is still a pleasant comic line occasionally, but, in general, the comedy strikes me as pretty tired.

The acting may be described as pleasant. Beatrice Pearson is perhaps a trifle bouncy as the American girl, but she plays attractively, and Ralph Michael is agreeable as the morally stalwart young Englishman. Melville Cooper, as always, is entertaining as Lord Crayne, and Richard Gordon is of help as the American father. I thought George Mitchell was remarkably believable in the small role of an Irish doctor, and the members of the aristocracy were competently portrayed. But its nostalgia isn't enough to bring "The Day After Tomorrow" to life.

Journal American
October 27, 1950

Good Chatter Adds Up to Double Zero

By JOHN McCLAIN

John McClain is reviewing the new plays while Robert Garland, the drama critic, recuperates from his recent illness.

The Messrs. Lee and J. J. Shubert unraveled at their Booth Theatre last evening a new comedy by Frederick Lonsdale called "The Day After Tomorrow, which is based on the (to me) preposterous assumption that a vigorous young man ain't going to marry a beautiful young doll because she unfortunately has nine million dollars.

It has some of the old sparkling Lonsdale chatter, its is Suitably set and everybody strives manfully, but the sum total is double zero in my book.

It seems that there are several members of an impoverished British family who are about to be dispossessed from their ancestral menage when the inevitable American millionaire and his daughter are dropped into their laps.

Gerard, the eager member of the group, has a small farm and is quite prepared to work his land and provide employment for the displaced and indigent relatives but this program becomes extremely unattractive to them when they realize that the millionaire's daughter is in love with Gerard and their mutual problems can be solved the minute he says, "YES."

Well, how long does it take you to say, "YES."?

At the Booth it takes Gerard about two hours and it isn't funny enough while he says "NO" and "MAYBE". This young American girl chases him all over the joint, finally backing him into a room in a small country inn where he reluctantly succumbs to the fact that he is only flesh and blood after all.

This man has admitted from the outset that he is wildly in love with the girl, and she has been obviously vice-versa. This man needs money and so do all the other characters around him, yet he is standing the whole thing off on the basis that to take the dough would ruin their chances of happiness.

Okay, so why don't they give the money away? I can find them a taker and he is no farther away than this typewriter. As I grow older I find myself less and less moved by dramas in which the great problem is the fact that somebody is too rich.

* * *

Cast Is Good

Beatrice Pearson plays the role of the young lady with all the loot and I can only say that I would give her a fast "YES" four minutes after the curtain ran up even if she only had six million clams.

Melville Cooper, of the tired St. Bernard eyes, is his famously capable self as the uncle of the Lord of the manor about which the whole fuss takes place and Ralph Michael plays Gerard, doing his best with a part which was, as I say, totally unbelievable to me.

My agents report that this show with a different cast ran for an extended time in London. I am also advised that Mr. Lonsdale, the author, left these parts unexpectedly while the production was still in rehearsal and retired to the Riviera.

This might indicate that even he realized that his baby would not survive the rigors of an AMERICAN Winter.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune
October 27, 1950

By HOWARD BARNES

Never Comes

FREDERICK LONSDALE has toyed with a tiny notion in his new drawing room comedy, "The Day After Tomorrow." Although the new offering at the Booth employs a triple platoon system of performers, it piles up next to nothing in the way of amusement. Such able actors as Melville Cooper, Ralph Michael and Bramwell Fletcher are frequently left trying to find an arbitrary exit from the proceedings. They are lucky to get off stage. There is so little wit and consequence in the script itself that it comes to a conclusion chiefly through inertia.

The author has picked some exceedingly dull observations on manners and morals to give his work some suggestion of momentum. On the one hand he has centered on the foibles of a British ducal family in financial distress. On the other he has whipped up a romance between an American heiress and the nicest member of the nobility which never even achieves a slight froth for all the beating. The idea of an industrial magnate's daughter being repulsed by an impoverished Englishman gives the play what carrying power it has. For all the frantic efforts of Michael and Beatrice Pearson, it is very skimpy.

Drawing room banter, when it is not bright, can be as dull as any dialogue that ever reaches a stage. The chit-chat in "The Day After Tomorrow" achieves something of a low in humor. Cooper, on occasion, makes something of frayed lines in the part of a preposterous uncle of the duke, who thinks he is cheating the American at cards only to find that the tycoon is expert enough to cheat himself in order to keep his hosts solvent. The actor can make even ordinary conversation glint with amusement. He alone remains self-possessed and in command of situations when the action is drifting off in all directions.

What Lonsdale has attempted to demonstrate in the love story is a secret which he has kept carefully to himself. Perhaps there is some comical meaning in the efforts of a rich American girl to marry a duke's brother, but it is not apparent in the exposition. Perhaps there is something embodied in the title which makes the nobleman's refusal to capitulate to charms and dollars interesting. There is very little in the production to stimulate even vague interest, let alone laughter. Jack Watling, Valerie Cossart, Richard Gordon, John Merivale and Madeleine Clive are some of those who exchange Lonsdale's banalities. They have supposedly been directed by the author, but their movements are as random as their repartee is boring.

Daily Mirror
October 27, 1950

'Day After Tomorrow' Not Top-Drawer Lonsdale

By ROBERT COLEMAN

It's good to have Frederick Lonsdale represented on Broadway again, but we wish it were by a better play than "The Day After Tomorrow." The new arrival at the Booth Theatre is a pleasantly innocuous little comedy from a shelf well below that from which "Aren't We All" or "The Last of Mrs. Cheyney" came.

"The Day After Tomorrow" boasts a familiar story, the one about the poor boy who is too proud to marry the rich girl. Even though he is a brother of the impoverished Duke of Bristol, a member of a titled family notable for its ability to shun work, honest and honorable Gerard insists on being a farmer.

For three acts, he refuses to wed Mary Flemin, an attractive and importunate American heiress. Mary had conveniently caught a slight case of pneumonia practically on the doorstep of Bristol Castle. But she and her wealthy dad finally put Gerard on the road to the altar, on Gerard's terms, and his relatives on the way to comfortable prosperity in Socialist England.

Lee and J. J. Shubert have engaged a cast of first-rate players, mostly British, for the Lonsdale comedy. Among them are Beatrice Pearson, Melville Cooper, Ralph Michael, Noel Leslie, Madeleine Clive, Monica Lang, John Merivale, Jack Watling, Valerie Cossart, Bramwell Fletcher, Richard Gordon, George Mitchell and Eva Leonard-Boyne.

Cooper, one of our favorite comedians, makes the most of the few opportunities provided him by author-director Lonsdale. He has the rare ability to make mediocre lines sparkle and seem funnier than they really are. Miss Pearson is so easy on the eyes as the heiress that it was difficult to believe Gerard could have resisted her blandishments for so long Michael, who has made but one brief appearance previously on the American stage, is ingratiating as Gerard.

"The Day After Tomorrow" was a London hit of last season. That we were unable to find much in it to admire points up again how different our theatrical tastes can be sometimes from those of our British cousins. It represents an amazingly obvious and repetitious effort for the usually brilliant and clever Lonsdale. Perhaps he has been on a literary austerity diet recently.

DAILY NEWS
October 27, 1950

Lonsdale's 'Day After Tomorrow' A Mild Little Comedy, British Style

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Quite a lot of American money is being spurned these days—in the theatre, where they use stage money. In "Call Me Madam" Paul Lukas declines a couple of hundred million from Ethel Merman, and in Frederick Lonsdale's comedy, "The Day After Tomorrow," Ralph Michael spurns Beatrice Pearson's ten million through frequently clenched teeth.

Mr. Lonsdale's play, which had a London success under the title of "The Way Things Go," was presented at the Booth last evening by Lee and J. J. Shubert. It is a comedy about a rich American girl and a poor but well-born young Briton who has scruples. It seems to be Mr. Lonsdale's intent to show that scruples are something nice to have, and not a disease. I remain to be convinced, for "The Day After Tomorrow" is not a very vigorous work.

Girl Wants Boy.

Mr. Michael is a member of a titled, castled and busted English family which is about to lose everything when Miss Pearson and her father, a washing-machine tycoon, appear. The young lady decides she wants the young man and politely offers him Everything. He just as politely declines, saying that his wants are simple. All he needs is the young lady herself to help him work the farm. Even when she seduces him he sticks to his terms, and I guess they are going to live happily ever after without having to use any of her mazuma, kale, long green, scratch, boodle, cabbage or hay.

I suppose the comedy is intended to demonstrate that a Briton can get along very well with nothing more than a scruple or two between himself and dissolution. But he could do with a few more laughs while he is wearing his tweeds down to the herringbone. "The Day After Tomorrow" is pleasantly intended and pleasantly played, but it did not have a very firm grip on my attention last evening.

Many Extra Actors.

For one thing, I kept forgetting the progress of Miss Pearson's conquest and wondering why they had to have so many actors for so simple a tale. Bramwell Fletcher plays a duke; Noel Leslie plays a bishop; John Merivale, Jack Watling, Melville Cooper and Mr. Michael play the duke's brothers. Then there are various wives, portrayed by Monica Lang, Valerie Cossart and Madeleine Crane. With the exception of Melville Cooper, none of them has much to do except stand around in, or come in and out of, Edward Gilbert's baronial set.

Mr. Cooper is a funny man by nature, so he can get the best out of very little. Miss Pearson is cuddly. Mr. Michael is a good type. Mr. Fletcher is imperious. Richard Gordon is much too nice and intelligent to be an American washing-machine tycoon. And Mr. Lonsdale, the author, may have been thinking that we have only recently got over World War I.

"The Curious Savage"

New York Post
HOME NEWS
October 25, 1950

Madness and the Savage Family
By Richard Watts Jr.

If Lillian Gish had played the title role in "The Madwoman of Chaillot," this rebellious reviewer might not have found himself holding out sullenly against the famous and successful Giraudoux fantasy. At least, John Patrick's new comedy, "The Curious Savage," which opened at the Martin Beck last night, revealed Miss Gish in a part reminiscent of the eccentric heroine of the French comedy, and it seemed to me that, not only was she extremely good in the characterization, but that the play was surprisingly pleasant entertainment.

A sanitarium for the insane does not strike me as the most agreeable setting for a comedy, and fun among the inmates necessarily bears a certain uncomfortable resemblance to the sport the British citizenry of the Eighteenth Century used to see in Bedlam, even when it is portrayed with taste and reticence. Nor do I think that Mr. Patrick quite gets over this handicap. But, on the whole, he has managed things engagingly enough to remove the greater part of the embarrassment and substitute an oddly likeable charm.

The Inmates

This is in great part due to the excellence of the acting and the skill of the direction by Peter Glenville, who did the brilliant staging of "The Innocents" last season. Miss Gish is lovely, humorous and, touching as a lady of originality and independence, whose step-children are trying to put her away in an asylum, and her performance has authentic style and imagination about it. The other inmates, too, are attractively played by Isobel Elsom, Gladys Henson, Robert Emhardt, Lois Hall and Hugh Reilly, with the result that the misfits of "The Curious Savage" become pleasant rather than painful.

There really isn't a great deal to the story of Mr. Patrick's play, and its narrative is unquestionably slender. Its heroine is an elderly lady with a fortune, who wants to spend her money enabling people to do the odd and impractical things for which they have always yearned. So her practical step-children want to put her away until she has surrendered her millions to them. You will hardly be astounded to learn that the relatives are confounded, and that the lady likes her fellow inmates so much that she hates to leave The Cloisters, as the sanitarium is called.

Matter of Sanity

Wisely, I think, Mr. Patrick hasn't tried to be too philosophical about his little story. Although his heroine turns out to be extremely sound of mind, he doesn't even attempt to say that the other inmates are saner than those in the outside world. They are just nicer, and their conduct is at least more sensible than that of the rapacious members of the Savage family. Chiefly, the author merely tells us that liberty is, among other things, the right to behave impractically and foolishly if you want to, and gets on with his modest tale about the thwarting of the practical-minded.

The insane and the allegedly insane have all the best of it in the writing of the play, but the representatives of the sober outside world are not neglected in the playing. Flora Campbell and Sydney Smith are effective as a sympathetic nurse and doctor, and the disagreeable and baffled Savages are well portrayed by Marta Linden as the most wolfish of the trio, and by Brandon Peters and Howard Wendell as her brothers. "The Curious Savage" is by no means brilliant, significant or overwhelming, but Miss Gish's delightful performance makes it a modestly engaging evening in the theatre.

"THE CURIOUS SAVAGE"

Comedy by John Patrick; staged by Peter Glenville; settings by George Jenkins; costumes by Anna Hill Johnstone; presented by the Theatre Guild, Russell Lewis and Howard Young at the Martin Beck Theatre, October 24, 1950. The cast:

Florence.....Isobel Elsom
Hannibal.....Robert Emhardt
Fairy May.....Lois Hall
Jeffrey.....Hugh Reilly
Mrs. Paddy.....Gladys Henson
Titus.....Brandon Peters
Samuel.....Howard Wendell
Lily Belle.....Marta Linden
Ethel.....Lillian Gish
Miss Wilhelmina.....Flora Campbell
Dr. Emmett.....Sydney Smith

Synopsis: The scene is in the living-room of "The Cloisters." Act I. Scene 1. Night. Scene 2. The next morning. Act II. Scene 1. That night after dinner. Scene 2. A few nights later. Act III. A few minutes later.

DAILY NEWS
October 25, 1950

'Curious Savage' Tender Comedy

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Back in 1944 John Patrick wrote a play, "The Hasty Heart," about a Scottish soldier in a hospital behind the lines in Burma, and such words as gentle and tender were used in its praise. Last evening the Theatre Guild and the firm of Lewis & Young presented another Patrick play, "The Curious Savage," at the Martin Beck. Again the words tender and gentle come to mind—and to them must be added the information that, in the title role, Lillian Gish gives an extraordinarily sweet, graceful and puckish performance.

This time Mr. Patrick has ventured onto more dangerous ground than a war front, for his subjects are the inhabitants of a private asylum for the insane. Insanity is no obvious subject for comedy, being a pretty grim and heartbreaking human ailment; yet Mr. Patrick has managed, with gentle insight and good sense, to make it pretty funny. He seems to believe that, with all the odd and unpleasant people who are loose in the world, a mild case of lunacy is rather a decent ailment to have—and quite enjoyable, too.

It's Fun to Be Crazy.

Miss Gish is a widow who has kicked over the traces. She has decided that she will use her husband's $10,000,000 estate to help people do the foolish things they have dreamed of doing. She has sent a thousand school children on a tour of the world because she thinks they ought to see it while there is a world left. She has dyed her own hair blue. And she has converted the Savage estate into cash and hidden the cash, thus doing her three stepchildren out of what they think is theirs.

Naturally, this trio—a senator, a judge and a much-divorced woman have her committed to a retreat called the Cloisters. Here she meets, understands and loves some people who are pleasantly unbalanced. A statistician who can't play a note properly on a violin, but who fancies himself a Paganini and gives concerts. A young ex-aviator who really can play the piano but won't, because he imagines his face has been disfigured and he won't confront a concert audience. A homely but imaginative young girl who merely wants to be loved and thought beautiful. A woman who believes that a doll is her dead son. And one queer old creature whose enjoyment is hating everything and reciting long lists of things she hates. This last one is the only real trouble-maker, for she has given up electricity for Lent and turns off the lights every chance she gets.

Hates Electricity, Too.

These people all are kind to each other; each pretends to believe in the foibles of the others. They have made a little world of contentment and affection, and Miss Gish comes to prefer them to her stepchildren, who are just plain greedy and cruel.

Mr. Patrick's plot is not too robust, but what there is of it concerns the search for the missing millions. They are found, then stolen in the darkness. When the story seems to be dwindling to the vanishing point, Mr. Patrick manages a neat little twist that brings it back again.

Miss Gish is thoroughly charming and entirely lovely in the role of the widow. Gladys Henson is very funny as the woman who has decided to give up light, and there are amiable performances by Isobel Elsom, Lois Hall, Robert Emhardt, Flora Campbell, Marta Linden and others. "The Curious Savage" offers an evening of gentle laughter, plus a teardrop or two and a dash of wisdom. I think this is all Mr. Patrick and his many able collaborators, including director Peter Glenville, ever intended the play should offer.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

October 25, 1950

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Only Mildly Maniacal

A PRIVATE mental institution provides a far from happy background for a supposedly antic commentary in "The Curious Savage." The John Patrick comedy at the Martin Beck has moments of genuine humor as mild maniacs of good will confront rational evildoers. It has a very fine performance by Lillian Gish, playing a half-daft go-between, and clever direction by Peter Glenville. The trouble is that the author has let his theme grow listless and monotonous, while his characters act with the real folly that should have them properly incarcerated.

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The gist of the plot is that there is every reason in the world for an exceedingly rich woman to leave her money to those who have need of foolishness, rather than those who are foolish enough to be in need. Patrick expatiates on the idea at great length without making it seem more bulky or profound than it sounds in bare statement. The tricking up of abnormality as wisdom is a very difficult theatrical job, however glib it may seem on the surface. It has been effected cumbersomely in "The Curious Savage." Without Miss Gish's petulant and frequently touching portrayal of the Mrs. Savage who confounds her greedy step-children, the play would barely stagger to a final curtain.

* * *

While the author makes much of the screwloose capers of the inmates of "The Cloisters," his chief merriment stems from the doing in of predatory intruders from the outside world. Miss Gish has several delightful scenes with the members of her family, played by Brandon Peters, Marta Linden and Howard Wendell, although most of the fun takes place offstage. The step-children are portrayed in such black colors that even the staff of the institution helps the curious Mrs. Savage protect her mammoth nest egg and even springs her from the grinny-bin.

When it comes to the psychotic fancies of the old lady's temporary companions, they have more jar than jest to them. Robert Emhardt, as a statistician who has been put out of work by a calculating machine and thinks himself a violinist, is the fellow you would most like to spend some time with, if you had to. Gladys Henson rattles off lists of hates at a patter pace; Lois Hall flings herself around embarrassingly; Isobel Elsom is gently sad as a bereaved mother and Hugh Reilly is just too normal to be at all convincing as a nut. Miss Gish holds what play there is together in "The Curious Savage" and even she cannot keep amusement sustained.

The New York Times

October 25, 1950

Lillian Gish in the Theatre Guild's Production of 'The Curious Savage'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

In the days before the great enlightenment, people used to go to Bedlam to enjoy the odd behavior of the lunatics. Last evening, the Theatre Guild invited the subscribers to the Martin Beck to see the antics of the characters in "The Curious Savage."

John Patrick, who wrote "The Hasty Heart," has written this excursion into a modern Bedlam. Presumably, he has something more than sensation and curiosity in mind.

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For his chief character is an elderly lady whose gaiety and generous impulses look like lunacy to her stepchildren. Alarmed by the liberality with which she gives money away to people she likes, her stepchildren have her committed to an institution.

If you imagine that the patients in the mental institution are more amiable than the stepchildren, and that the elderly lady returns with genuine regrets and misgivings to the sane world outside, you are a very experienced theatregoer indeed, and need no further instruction. Mr. Patrick's attitude is not exactly original.

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Things in the theatre are criticized frequently as being in bad taste. Some people think that Olsen and Johnson are in bad taste, which seems plausible. But this column would like to suggest that "The Curious Savage" is also in bad taste, and that the delusions and crotchets of people who are mentally ill are not genuinely amusing.

Mr. Patrick has filled his comedy with bright remarks, precocious sayings and the foibles of the mad. No doubt his intentions are honorable. We have "The Hasty Heart" to show that he is a man of compassion. But the writing of "The Curious Savage" is not subtle, and the performance is a lark. To at least one theatregoer, this jovial portrait of psychopathic people is embarrassing.

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Although Peter Glenville has directed the performance nimbly, he cannot exorcize the spirit of the comedy. And if you are not comfortable in the company of the deranged inmates of a mental institution, you are likely to regard Lillian Gish's performance as a trifle kittenish in the part of the roguish lady who is legally sane.

Robert Emhardt gives a first-rate performance as the most cheerful of the imbeciles, finding just the right tone and emphasis to define a character. The cast also includes Isobel Elsom, Marta Linden, Flora Campbell, Gladys Henson, Lois Hall and Hugh Reilly, who give good performances in other parts. The single set of the living-room in a home-like institution has been pleasantly designed by George Jenkins.

On its own terms as polite entertainment with a faint edge of satire, "The Curious Savage" is a fairly mild play. But many theatregoers are likely to regard the whole project as distasteful. Bedlam is not so delightfully amusing as it was a hundred years ago.

Daily Mirror

October 25, 1950

Guild's 'Curious Savage' Turns Quite Tame

By ROBERT COLEMAN

In "The Curious Savage," John Patrick started out to create a mood and ended by fashioning a contrived play around a fascinating idea. This is all the more remarkable in view of the fact that the Theatre Guild and Lewis & Young engaged the skillful Peter Glenville to direct the new arrival at the Martin Beck Theatre. Glenville is something of a genius at evoking a mood.

The curious "Savage" is a dowager with $10,000,000, three greedy stepchildren and some definite, if unorthodox, ideas about how to spend her money. She takes dancing lessons, backs plays, even acts in one of them, and she dyes her hair different colors. She buys flamboyant costumes, and carries a battered Teddy Bear about in her arms.

But when she proposes to set up a fund for people she considers intelligent to do a wacky thing or two, the stepchildren have her committed to a private sanitarium. She eventually bests them at their own game, and exits from the institution with compassion, understanding and responsibility gained from her association with the other inmates.

There is an absorbing and touching play in Patrick's conception, but he hasn't managed to write it. He reaches too readily for the gag, the gimmick, the glib line. His situations and characters become stocky, where they should be honest, sensitive and searching.

During an out-of-town tune-up, Lillian Gish replaced Patricia Collinge in the title role. Miss Gish gives a compelling performance, but even her artistry is insufficient to rescue a faltering script.

Other first-raters in the cast are Isobel Elsom, Flora Campbell, Marta Linden, Lois Hall, Gladys Henson, Robert Emhardt, Brandon Peters, Sydney Smith, Hugh Reilly and Howard Wendell.

"The Curious Savage" could have been and should have been as arresting and rewarding as "The Silver Whistle." But it isn't. Author Patrick has taken the easy and obvious way out too many times. Though a dressy first-night audience appeared to enjoy it, we were able to share its enthusiasm only intermittently. That's not enough.